No. 70

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

She heard a noise outside, but it was not her husband approaching. Ellen's heart beat wildly. She expected—she knew not what!

R. of M. G., No. 70.

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SLOWLY Victor went homewards. His rage was gone, but instead a gnawing grief was in his heart. Why did the world inflict upon him fresh wounds while the old ones were still raw? He had a wild longing to fly with his wife where they were both unknown, or to a solitude where they would be alone.

As he came nearer home, he walked more erectly and tried to assume a quiet expression.

Suddenly he started. What was that? Someone lying on the porch at the door? He ran forward.

It was Lillian. Filled with fear and dread, he raised her.

"My God," he murmured, "what has happened?"

He carried her inside in his arms. Mrs. Ruggles met him in the hall. With a cry she tottered back as she saw him and his burden, but quickly she pulled herself together.

Not an unnecessary word did she say, but quickly she helped Talbot to lay the young woman on a couch and busied herself to restore her to consciousness.

An ashen pallor spread over Victor's face; his brows contracted in a dark frown as he gazed upon the unconscious form of his wife.

His expression was almost uncanny in the set, fixed look of his eyes.

Taking her head between his hands, he held her while Mrs. Ruggles moistened Lillian's forehead and temples with water.

Slowly the eyes opened and life again returned to the motionless figure.

"God be thanked!" murmured Talbot, drawing a deep breath as he saw a faint color returning to the pale cheeks.

What a piteous, sorrowful look it was which she

directed toward him as, languidly and heavily, her eyes opened! What did it mean?

Had she, too, been hurt by the malicious and bitter tongues of the merciless gossipers?

It was some time, however, before Lillian could find the strength to speak. What a dreadful shock it must have been to have affected her so deeply!

"Do you feel better now, my love?" asked Talbot gently as he tenderly drew her to him.

She nodded weakly; then, with a low, heart-rending moan whispered:

"Oh Victor—the dreadful, wicked people!"

He shrank back. It was this, then!

They had struck the poor innocent girl to the very heart, so thoughtlessly, so unmercifully!

And as she broke into convulsive sobs, her head on his shoulder, he was overpowered by the weight of the responsibility which he had undertaken in linking her fate to his.

Undoubtedly this ceaseless torment would continue, blow upon blow through his entire life, not even sparing his gentle little wife, until at last, broken and despondent, she could withstand the misery of it no longer.

To see her thus, day after day, patient and uncomplaining under this yoke of suffering would be more than he could bear.

Not once did he attempt to console or comfort her; it was as if unseen fingers held his throat in a choking grasp and he was powerless to utter a sound.

Only his trembling hand caressed the curling locks and brushed them back from her forehead.

Little by little she grew calmer.

Then she threw both arms about his neck, kissing him passionately as though she wished to counteract

through her love what the world had inflicted and was still inflicting upon him.

For her sake he restrained himself. Above all, he sought to learn what had happened to her, and after much coaxing and persuasion he elicited her story.

Victor Talbot's powers of self-command were strained to the utmost to subdue the rage that stormed within him and sought for expression, for he felt Lillian's hurts more intensely than his own.

In the richness of their mutual love, they comforted each other, but sorrow could not be banished from their souls.

The brightness of their love for each other could not be tarnished, but it was darkened by the veil which the world cast over them.

Both tried to hide their grief from one another and to lighten their lot by the expression of their love, but their days seemed ever to be under a storm that would never burst asunder.

From this time on, Lillian went no more to the village.

She concerned herself no longer with the poor and the sick, now that her benevolence had brought her such heartache.

While Victor was at home, she maintained a cheerful demeanor, but as soon as he was out of the house, melancholy would overcome her and she would surrender to her thoughts.

She became thinner and paler with each day. Talbot felt greatly troubled for her, for if this went on she would become positively ill.

He took Dr. Van Buren into his confidence, the doctor being one of the few who had no doubts about the case.

"Your wife must see life and gayety," said he.

"Take her into society so that she may find diversion and form other thoughts. You, yourself, say that you were well received in town. Why don't you find suitable company for your wife?"

As if in fulfillment of his words, an invitation came the next day for Victor and Lillian to a dinner and ball from Mr. and Mrs. Belmont. Mr. Belmont was the principal banker in town.

To Lillian's surprise, Victor declared that he would accept the invitation. Timid and anxious, the young wife took his hand.

"Do we really want to go among people?" she asked softly. "I dread them—I am afraid."

"Have no fear, sweetheart," he soothed. "We cannot go on like this, you must have company and diversion. You are too young to bury yourself like a hermit."

She agreed and, in fact, in a few days she showed great improvement.

She had her wardrobe and sundry other matters of toilet to think about and to prepare for the occasion.

Her ideas struck a new channel and there was not so much time for brooding.

At last the evening of the ball had come. It opened brilliantly.

The rooms were magnificently decorated, and the soft luster of many lights shone on a scene of dazzling beauty.

Among the guests were the "elect" of the town and some of the loveliest women to be seen anywhere were there.

But fairest among the fair, was Lillian. Like a wood nymph in a simple white gown, unadorned save for a few sprays of delicate maiden-hair fern, she stepped into the ball room.

What a fine pair! All regarded them with

interest.

This handsome, knightly man, the picture of manly strength, erect and proud, and this dainty young woman in her modest loveliness. They were the cynosure of all eyes.

They did not long remain alone. Many came forward in curiosity to speak to them, and others to express, by a mere shake of the hand, that they agreed heartily in the verdict of the court in Talbot's case.

Lillian had heretofore seldom mingled in society.

Her girlish confusion was enchanting. Her cheeks flushed softly as she modestly returned the greetings directed to her, and there was something of a maidenly composure and sweet dignity in her face rarely seen in habitual frequenters of gay functions.

Some of the younger men present ventured to surround her with their attentions and flattery, but soon felt from her earnest look, that she was of a different nature than the women with whom they were accustomed to associate.

The gay whirl proved increasingly interesting and fascinating to Lillian.

She stood fearlessly, yet modestly, regarding the company with the innocent inquiry of a child who suddenly sees something new, to which it is unaccustomed.

She studied the people and their expressions and received countless, altogether new, impressions

Victor remained near her, his eyes and ears open to shield his love from the slightest danger of insult or mortification, either direct or implied.

Dr. Van Buren had also been invited, but came a little late and joined them. He was welcomed by Lillian as a dear old friend, and both he and Victor were glad to see her cheerful and happy.

Suddenly, however, she gripped her husband's

arm nervously. The color had left her cheeks, and as he glanced in the direction in which she was looking, he saw Mrs. Crawford coming through the door.

For a moment Talbot, too, was seized by a painful emotion. A meeting with her in the presence of so many strange eyes would be unpleasant for them all.

Quickly pulling himself together, he whispered to Lillian:

"Calm yourself, my dear, you are my wife and there is nothing to be afraid of."

She smiled and gave him a grateful look. No, she did not fear her stepmother. She was safe in his protection.

Mrs. Crawford well knew that she would meet the couple at this affair, but this had not deterred her from coming. On the contrary, she felt that she would have better opportunity to make them suffer some of the punishment she had in store for them.

Up to this time, in spite of her resentment, she had undertaken nothing against them.

She was prudent enough to perceive that it would be better to avoid a public scandal which would be inevitable if she attacked their marriage in a foreign country.

Such an attack, she knew, would be futile and would merely stir up the dust of exposure. She had, therefore, held her counsel, apparently resigning herself to things as they were.

Her longing for revenge, however, increased in intensity while she waited for a suitable chance to indulge it.

Where it was possible, she cast her sly insinuations. Many of her remarks had been carried into the village and had no little share in the horror in which Talbot was held there.

The pastor, who was to a certain extent depend-

ent upon Mrs. Crawford, at her instigation, had denied himself to the young couple when they called to visit him.

She had firmly resolved to make it impossible for Oliver and Lillian to mingle in society, and it was with malice in her heart that she had come this evening.

She appeared upon the scene like a queen in her regal beauty.

Her dress was some wonderful mingling of misty lace and shimmering satin; diamonds glittered on her bodice and brilliant jewels flashed gloriously on her throat, in her hair and on her fingers.

Despite her elegant and gorgeous appearance, it did not cover up the treacherous heart beneath—at least not to Victor, who could discern the hard lines which her passions had engraved about her mouth.

Her beauty was waning; she was aging.

As Mrs. Crawford approached, Lillian went toward her almost involuntarily, as though to offer her hand to her step-mother.

Mrs. Crawford, however, merely regarded her with a contemptuous, icy look and walked haughtily past her.

Lillian stepped back wounded. She was bitterly hurt.

Talbot pressed his lips together. He was angry with himself not to have warned Lillian against approaching her step-mother.

In her pale, set features, he saw what a torture it was for her to bear the many half-scornful looks that were directed toward them both, for the incident had not passed unnoticed.

Quickly he drew her arm through his and led her to a divan on which she sat down, utterly dejected.

Meantime Mrs. Crawford was greeting the

hostess, and then, turning away with Mr. Belmont, went over to some acquaintances who were assembled not far from where Lillian was reposing.

In well-played horror, she dropped her lorgnette and pretended a feeling of such shock that her neighbors looked up at her, startled.

"Good gracious! What is this?" she burst out in apparent excitement and in a tone loud enough for all who were near to hear. "How could I expect to meet people here to whom my house is closed!

"You must forgive me, my dear Mr. Belmont if I retire, but I really do not feel quite well. No, no, do not disturb yourself, I must not take you away from your guests."

Her sudden indisposition, however, did not hinder her at all from going to the hostess in a dramatic manner to take leave of her.

Of course, there was great concern, also a request to stay, perhaps the indisposition would pass.

Mrs. Crawford's answer was renewed shrugging, a suffering mien. No, she could not: her feeling of honor would not permit her to stay longer.

She rustled out, haughty as a queen who knows that her withdrawal creates an unfillable void.

All eyes were naturally turned towards her, then there was a putting of heads together, murmuring and whispering.

The banker's wife looked very much put out and seemed to be reproaching her husband.

A harsh discord had jangled the harmony of the occasion out of tune, and the cause of the trouble were —the Talbots!

Really, Mrs. Crawford could not be blamed for her action. She had, in a measure, disowned her stepdaughter and had forbidden Talbot her house.

She could not very well meet them even on this neutral ground.

The general opinion had been that the banker had shown a great lack of tact to invite the couple, and also Mrs. Crawford. It was well known that Belmont was friendly with the Talbot's, and he should have guarded against this encounter.

So the murmurs ran hither and thither and many a malicious glance struck the unhappy couple who suddenly seemed to be outlawed and cast out.

No one came to speak to them. They sat alone.

Dr. Van Buren had previously left the ball room, having been called away. Victor and Lillian were completely isolated.

Mrs. Crawford's ruse was thoroughly successful, and the two could not help but see that they had become impossible here.

Lillian restrained her tears heroically.

With a pressure that revealed the intensity of his feeling, Talbot took her hand as if to invoke her not to appear weak before the cold, strange eyes around them.

"Victor, let us go home," she pleaded softly, deep pain vibrating in her voice.

"Yes, it would be best," he nodded bitterly.

Then, bending over her, he begged urgently:

"Darling, bear up for a few minutes. Do not give these people the triumph of seeing you cast down. Though they may hurt us, we shall not show them that we feel it."

This was effective. She rose energetically, and with a nervous smile took his arm.

Erect, in unbreakable pride in the consciousness of his innocence, they walked to the host and hostess to make their adieu. Polite regrets were exchanged, and they passed through the room in departure.

Talbot felt how Lillian's arm trembled in his and he knew what an effort it was for her to maintain composure.

Barely had they left the ball room, when Victor hastily opened the door to a side room, for he was aware that Lillian was swaying. The chamber was empty.

Quickly he led her in, supporting her with both hands.

She clung to him and the tears, so long repressed, ran down her cheeks. She wept almost hysterically, her delicate frame shaking with sobs.

Talbot did not disturb her; he felt that tears would be a relief for her.

His mute, tender carresses at last restored her to herself a little, and he took her up in his arms like a child, and helped her to put on the wraps which he had ordered brought in.

Together in their automobile, she put her head wearily on his shoulder.

"Oh, Victor," she prayed, "let us live quietly for one another and we will be happy. We do not need society."

He nodded silently.

He was choked by a burning pain of grief for what he accused himself of having brought upon his wife. This was his curse for having bound her to him.

She must drag with him the heavy chains which he was condemned to wear.

"Oh God above," he prayed inwardly, in the bitterness of his soul. "let me suffer, but spare my poor, innocent wife!"

What made it so much harder for him was the fact that Mrs. Crawford was a woman. There seemed absolutely no chance to punish her Had she been a man he would have thrashed her soundly in his boundless rage.

"You are right about what you said a moment ago, Lillian," he began, pressing her tenderly to his heart. "We do not need society."

When he kissed her, he found her lips hot and feverish.

"Please try to forgot what happened to-night, darling," he coaxed. "If you continue worrying about it, you will become ill."

"I—I will try to forget it," Lillian answered with a heartbreaking sigh.

Chapter 230

THE PARTING

PHILIP GORDON'S arrival in Chicago was most timely. And he did not reach the home of Mr. Shields a moment too soon. In another fifteen minutes the governess and his children would have been on the way to the nearest police station. As he burst into the room, accompanied by the police inspector, the officer sent to arrest Miss Desmond, was just prodding her to "get moving." The hot blood of anger mounted Gordon's face.

With a few long strides he stood beside the governess and laid a protecting hand in her shoulder.

"Hold on a minute!" he cried, glaring at the officer.

"Who are you?" the latter inquired harshly.

Before Phil could make a reply, the inspector stepped forward and seized the officer by the arm.

"That's alright, Frank," he said. "This gentleman is Mr. Gordon, the father of the children. We have made a mistake in this case. I'll explain. Come with me"

While the two police officials withdrew from the room, Marie was fast breaking under the strain.

With a little moan she sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Phil went over to her and patted her bowed head tenderly.

"I am sorry this thing had to happen, Miss Desmond," he said. "I wish I could have been home to prevent it."

At his touch she started up. The gentleness of his

tone and his caressing touch was more than she could stand.

With a quick move she glided out of his reach.

"Please don't be alarmed," he told her in the same gentle tone. "There is nothing to be afraid of. Now sit down and get over this fright. Thank God I came in time to prevent the worst."

She glanced at him half fearfully, half gratefully.

"Oh, it was awful," she murmured. "That terrible police officer wanted to arrest me. He said that I must bring the chidren to court with me, and that I had been charged with kidnapping. Just imagine how frightened those poor little lambs would have been.

"I did not care so much for myself. But the children. Oh!" she ended with a shiver. "I can't imagine anything worse than having them dragged into a court of justice. It would have been so awful."

Gordon grasped her hand with emotion.

"You never think of yourself, Miss Desmond, only of the children," he cried. "You are devoted to them to the point of self-sacrifice, and your thanks have been hatred and enmity, and your life has been rendered miserable in every conceivable manner."

"Well, it is all over now, Mr. Gordon," she said, forcing a smile to her lips, as she rose.

Her heart was beating wildly. His presence disturbed her composure.

But he felt a need to tell her what weighed on his heart.

He felt there was no one to whom he could speak as he could to her, and that no one could understand him as well as she.

"Miss Desmond," he began abruptly, breathing heavily and restraining her with gentle violence and pointing to the chair from which she had risen, "hear

me. You do not know what has been troubling me for a long while.

"I must tell you. I have received word that my first wife — the mother of my children — is still alive What her motive may have been to remain away from her family all this time, God only knows.

"I have come here to Chicago to find her, for she has been seen here; and I will find her, for she has been seen here; and I will find her, I will not rest until I have succeeded.

"I am afraid, however," he went on bitterly, "that I will not find happiness with her, for meantime she has become entirely estranged to me and still more to the children. But it must be — their mother belongs to them.

"Through my fault she has suffered inhumanly, and even if I no longer love her, I am sincerely sorry for what I have done, and I wish to make what amends I can.

"But, Miss Desmond, if I am able to inform you one day that I have found her and ask you to give up Harry and Phyllis, what then? Will it not break your heart to leave them? Because I know how you love them. I held it my duty to prepare you for the future."

Marie listened to him with bowed head. A light quiver ran through her. She raised her eyes bravely.

"You are right, Mr Gordon," she said, "the children belong to their mother, and when the time comes I must yield to the inevitable As much as I love them, why——" her voice broke suddenly.

It seemed as though she had lost all self-command. Hastily she sprang up and rushed to the door.

"I will bring the children," she said, without showing him her face. "Please, wait a moment." She was gone.

Gordon went to the window; his breast heaved mightily.

He was touched by the thought that, perhaps, she must soon part from the children, but somehow he had expected that she would be much more affected than she was.

Perhaps she did not have any faith in his first wife's return. Perhaps she believed that his search this time would also be fruitless.

In a few moments, the door opened again and Marie came in with the children. With glad cries they rushed to their father to kiss and embrace him.

For a time Phil forgot the governess' presence. With overflowing tenderness, he drew the children to him, took them on his knee and covered them with caresses.

Marie turned away. His love for the children shook her to the core.

Her longing to belong to them, to enjoy at least some crumbs of his love, almost overpowered her.

At last Phil released the little ones. He was glad at heart to see them so happy. His eyes sought Marie.

Apparently lost in reverie, she stood mournfully at the window. He felt he had been unjust: she had shown him what pain it would be to her to relinquish the children.

And the woman to whom she would give them up had for years not concerned herself about them! Had not even asked if they were alive!

A tide of bitterness against his first wife surged in him anew. How far above her stood Marie Desmond, the image of self-sacrificing mother love.

As he approached her, he was struck again, now that her face was averted, how her figure and her bearing resembled that of his first wife. His sensations were

strong and weird.

Just then she turned her head, and he saw a tear trickle down her cheek.

"When do you intend to leave for the South?" he asked, violently suppressing his agitation.

"As soon as possible, Mr. Gordon," she told him, "if it is agreeable to you. The thought of staying here is detestable. I have only a few more preparations to complete, and we will be ready to go."

"Miss Desmond, will we go soon?" cried Phyllis. "Oh, how fine that will be, just like the first time when we went with you."

Smiling, Phil stroked the child's curly locks.

"Why can't you come with us, daddy?" asked Harry suddenly. "Dr. Van Buren said the othed day that you looked tired and ought to take a rest."

Marie's heart sank This must not be.

At Oak Manor she saw him only now and then, and knew just when he would come to the children, but if he went with them, they would be together day after day.

It would be unbearable unless she finally betrayed herself. To her relief, however, Phil answered:

"No, my boy, I cannot go with you, I have a great deal to do just now, and I cannot leave."

Suddenly he started up as if electrified.

Whose was that sharp, arrogant voice which he heard in the vestibule?

Marie, who was occupied with the children, had not heard it. But now she, too, heard as someone outside said:

"Never mind your announcements, I wish to speak to the governess of my children. You say she is in this room?"

The door was already being opened and Alice,

richly attired, entered.

At sight of Phil she paused as if rooted to the floor. An angry cry broke from her lips.

"Ah, so you are here, too?" she sneered. "Very good, really, I never would have imagined it!"

While Marie retired into the background, the children clung to her anxiously, and Phil slowly approached Alice.

"I have no doubt you would have been glad to hinder me if you could," he returned coldly. "I thank God, however, that I got wind of your intentions in time and rejoice that I was able to frustrate the trouble which you planned."

Alice's face became distorted with rage.

"Very fine, indeed, I must say," she mocked. "You look well in your part of knight errant. Of course, the virtuous maiden is being unjustly treated, although she spirited away the children.

"I call that the height of insolence and something she never would have dared to commit, except in the knowledge that you would gloss it over."

"Not a word more." Sternly, with eyes flashing with anger, Phil confronted her.

Turning to the governess, he requested her, as calmly as he could:

"Miss Desmond, will you be kind enough to take the children away?"

With a silent inclination of the head, Marie left the room with the children, without deigning to give one look at Phil's wife.

The door had barely closed behind her when Alice's rage broke out wildly.

"So, I have found you with this schemer!" she hissed. "You are her willing slave. You do whatever she may wish! People are beginning to talk about your

infatuation, although they cannot help being surprised that you have chosen her for your mistress."

"Woman, take care, or I may forget myself!" cried Phil. He had grasped her wrist with a pressure that made her cry out in pain.

"Let go!" she gasped. "Your passion for this person seems to have robbed you of your senses."

With an expression of loathing, Phil flung her hand from him.

"It is a pity for every word that is wasted on you. You judge all women by yourself, and your baseness lets you see no good. Miss Desmond is so superior to you, that she does not need my defense."

"Oh, I know that she is your ideal of virtue and purity!" replied Alice. "Too bad that you cannot marry her, yet that is the one thing that I cannot do—to make room for this—woman—so do not take any trouble in that direction."

The look of wrath in Phil's face made way for an expression of amused irony.

There was a weak spot in her armor and the shaft he was about to project, would pierce deep.

"Nevertheless," he said quietly, "you must accustom yourself to the thought that the marriage ties between us which, after all, exist only in name, will soon be loosened, and probably very soon. I am here in Chicago to find my first wife. There is positive proof that she is alive; Colonel Osgood saw her but a short time ago."

Alice was unprepared for this blow.

Motionless, with wide staring eyes, she gazed at Phil. Her face became colorless—she was as pale as a corpse.

"That—that is impossible," she faltered, clutching at the back of the chair for support. "It cannot be.

Your first wife is dead——and you know it. Who knows whom Colonel Osgood saw."

Phil shrugged his shoulders.

"Osgood is not the man to tell me anything unless he was sure of his ground," he rejoined. "I am convinced that in a short time my first wife will be found, and since our marriage was not annulled at the time she left me—you can see the consequences of her return."

The tone of irony which pervaded his voice, was unnoticed by Alice. She was in a state of uncontrollable agitation.

"But, then our marriage was never valid," said she, looking before her with dull eyes. "This is too horrible to think of! The scandal—no—no——"

Her proud, haughty attitude had suddenly vanished like the wind.

Her knees gave way under her. Weak and trembling, she fell into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

Gordon looked down at her without pity. This humiliation, he felt, she deserved. It was a just punishment for her crimes against Marie Desmond and his children.

Alice quite forgot about the hated governess in her agitation at this new development.

Could it be possible that, after all, she was to give place to Phil's first wife?

Little as she desired to stay at Oak Manor it was a crushing thought to be homeless, to losse her name.

Her marriage with Phil was nothing more than a pitiful farce between the acts.

It was quite a while before Alice again raised her head and she saw that Phil had been closely observing her.

This kindled her anger anew and roused her to fresh defiance. She would show him that his shot had

not wounded her.

Hastily springing up, she exclaimed:

"Bah! This sounds like a fairy tale," forcing herself into a scornful laugh which, however, only seemed a distortion of the face. "First of all we will wait and see if your first wife can be found. I will not attach the slightest importance to your empty talk."

"Well, we shall soon find out if this is empty talk or not," said Phil with imperturbable calmness, like a man who is certain of his cause.

His assurance did not fail to make an impression on Alice, and she bit her lips nervously.

"At all events, you are now prepared for my first wife's return at any time," he continued. "This time I will not rest until I have cleared up the mystery. For the sake of your good old father, whose name you will be again compelled to assume, I wish that I will soon find my first wife, and make this the cause of our final and complete separation.

"In case my present search should be unsuccessful, I will use all means at my disposal to secure a divorce from you; and in this case, your fate, instead of exciting sympathy, would bring upon you the contempt of the community."

With a hysterical laugh, Alice turned to go.

'We shall wait and see," she scowled. "It is easy to make threats. We will find out who will have to bear the contempt of the world, I, the wife whose husband has been faithless, or you and your mistress.

"You can do just as you please. And if you find your Marie, well then, I suppose you will fall in love with her all over again. But I would like to know whether she would agree to take half of your love and let your Miss Desmond have the other half!"

Before Phil could retort, she had gone.

Gordon wiped the moisture from his forehead. Thank God, she was gone, and would not again meet Marie Desmond. Every one of the harsh words which she directed toward the latter, cut him like a sword.

When he had become calmer he went up to the children and Marie.

She looked up for a moment as he came in, but it did not escape him that her hand which held a book, trembled violently.

"She has gone," he said, loud enough for the children to hear; then added in tones audible to Marie only, "and she will not be anxious to come again."

At this moment there was a knock at the door. The maid entered and handed Marie a telegram addressed to her.

It was from Mr. Shields and read:

"If Mr. Stanley calls, inform him I will be home at noon."

The governess had read aloud so that Phil had caught the message.

A shadow passed over his face and he drew his watch from his pocket.

"Half past eleven," he said. "Mr. Shields will soon be here." His manner had become expectant—hurried. "My time is growing short, Miss Desmond," he continued, "and I have some business to attend to. When do you expect to leave with the children for the South?"

Marie did not fail to notice his uneasiness and attributed it to a reluctance on his part to meet the lawyer.

"It was my intention to leave to-morrow, Mr. Gordon," she said.

"So soon?"

"Yes, on account of Harry," she replied. "I notice that our stay here excites the child too much. It is too noisy. The sooner we go, the better for him."

"You are probably right." He cast a look of loving solicitude at the pale, delicate boy.

"Then I shall not see you before your departure, and I had better provide you with funds."

Reluctantly, Marie took the money which he proceeded to hand to her. If he but knew how she was fixed financially!

He was certainly in greater need of the money than she, and yet, she could not decline.

His glance rested on her so expressively, so full of pain, that her eyes fell and her heart bounded wildly.

"Is there anything more you wish, Miss Desmond?" he inquired solicitously.

"Thank you, Mr. Gordon, there is nothing else—unless you can arrange good weather for us," she smiled, "so the children can live outdoors. You already have my route of travel.

"If, for any reason, it should have to be changed, I will let you know beforehand, so that you can always reach us."

Gordon nodded assent.

They had now said and done all that was needful, and he could go. Yet he did not seem to be able to tear himself away.

He shrank from the empty bleakness to which he was to return; every moment which he could spend near her was blessed.

At last he shook himself mentally, took tender leave of his children and stepped once more to the governess.

She was barely able to hold her feelings in leash and Phil was not much calmer.

Had she been just a little less self-possessed, had a plaint, a tear from her given him an idea of her real feelings, he would have yielded to the promptings of his

heart and drawn her to his breast.

What glorious bliss would then have opened to them! Their mistakes and misunderstandings would have been cleared away and happiness restored to their lives.

But Marie bore up bravely, setting her lips to avoid betraying her emotion.

"Good-bye, Miss Desmond," he said. "God be with you and the children. Write me often. Your letters will be the only pleasure left me."

With an effort she kept back the sobs that rose in her throat.

"Good-bye," she returned in a voice that could hardly be heard, while she hastily withdrew her hand from his grasp.

Taking another longing look at Marie, he left.

Every fibre of her body trembled with pain and agitation as Marie stood at the window and watched him drive away.

When he was out of sight, she sank on her knees with a cry of distress, her hands clasped over her face.

It seemed as though she must call him back and say; "Stay Phil, I am your first wife." But no, no. Unconsciously she pressed her hand to her lips. She must be silent, for never would she consent to be taken to Phil's heart from pity.

And yet, his going was so hard to bear!

Chapter 231

UNHAPPINESS

THE HOME of the Talbots had become oppressively quiet during the last few days. Mrs. Ruggles went about on tip-toes, her eyes reddened with tears, and Jennie, the young girl who had been hired to help her, was not singing at her work as was her habit.

Victor Talbot could hardly be recognized as the hearty rugged man of yore, for his features had become sharp and wore a strange expression.

Dark shadows lay under his eyes and lines of pain were drawn about his mouth.

He left the house only when absolutely necessary, and there was a reason. His young wife, who was everything he valued in life, lay ill.

The violent shocks to which she had been subjected, had produced their effect.

The events on the evening of the Belmont ball with their subsequent humiliations had proved too much for her already overstrained powers of endurance.

On the day following, a low fever seized Lillian and brought her to bed.

Talbot tortured himself with self-reproaches. Although he had foreseen that it must come to this, he had, nevertheless, surrendered to his longing for happiness and thereby involved Lillian in his misfortune. It was his fault. He was heart-broken when he saw her lying weak and listless.

But self-reproaches and remorse could not change the past. He must wait in patience and resign himself

to his fate.

All the torments which he had undergone in prison—what were they in comparison with those which had now come upon him! What were they in comparison with what he felt when he looked into Lillian's thin, feverflushed face and heard her low moans?

"This is your work," he accused himself, "you knew she must become miserable, must fade away in the shadow which hangs over your house and your own life! You cannot blame anyone but yourself. Great God, if she should die!"

With a groan, he pressed his hands to his eyes as if to shut out the dreadful vision. He dared not think of this contingency or he was already lost.

His despairing look rested constantly on the features of his young wife. Now and then great, heavy tear drops would roll down his cheeks, as in her fever he heard her moan:

"What have we done to you that you tread our hearts under foot? Why do you persecute us? Why do you throw our money back at us!"

"They have murdered her soul!" he gasped. "God forgive them, I cannot!"

Dr. Van Buren came at least twice daily. A deep friendship drew him and Talbot together, and it was of great consolation to the latter that in his sorrow and trouble, there was at least one who felt for him.

The doctor comforted him and breathed courage and hope into his soul. Lillian was very young and her constitution was strong enough to overcome this illness.

"This trouble has been gathering in her for a long time," Dr. Van Buren told Victor. "For years she lived in a state of mental pain under her stepmother's authority. Then her concern over your fate was added. Troubles of this kind will have an effect on the strongest

of natures."

"It was no wonder that she has broken down," admitted Talbot. He knew best what she must have suffered at the time of his imprisonment.

In these days of darkness, a bright, sunny letter arrived from Margaret Wentworth.

With her fiance and his mother, she had been to London at Ethel Sander's wedding to Hugh Vandrift, and she described fully the magnificence and splendor of the occasion.

Ethel's mother was supremely happy. She was going to settle in London to bask in the sunshine of her daughter's affluence.

The young bride, however, had been remarkably quiet. Her high spirits seemed to have vanished and her eyes were earnest and thoughtful as though there was something puzzling her.

"I really believe that she has come out of her dream of wealth," wrote Margaret. "She is no longer as enthusiastic as her mother. At the ceremony she was so pale that I thought she was ill.

"I think she realized for the first time the importance of the step she had taken, or perhaps she felt a sort of dread of life with her elderly husband. Poor Ethel!

"And yet, Mr. Vandrift is really a very worthy man. He has many fine traits and he certainly seems to love his little wife.

"And his son? He was extremely quiet and serious at the wedding. He has a very deep reserve and his face does not betray his feelings. The father and the son are very cordial to each other.

"I really wonder how the three will get along together. Just now the father is happiest of all. I pray they will all be happy together.

"And now I will proceed to the real object of this letter. Gerard and I intend to be married in Chicago so that you, my dear Lillian, and your husband, can be present. You must not be missing on my wedding day. Of course, you will come.

"Oh, I am also boundlessly happy, dear, and next to God, I have you to thank for it.

"I await your answer anxiously, for I would like to know how things are with you. But what a question —I can just imagine. You two must be very happy for you were made for each other."

Lillian was slowly recovering and was able to sit up when this letter came.

She had read it with tears in her eyes, and handed it with a heart-rending little smile to her husband for his perusal.

"She is right, she murmured, almost inaudibly, "we should be happy, for we love each other."

Victor set his teeth and pressed his lips together, but all his efforts did not prevent the tears from starting from his eyes.

"You write her and tell her everything, Victor," she begged after a while and then, finally, closed her eyes wearily.

This letter to Margaret proved a hard task for him. But, as his wife had asked, he wrote everything.

He concealed nothing and described how that malicious, revengeful woman, Mrs. Crawford, had heaped insult and mortification upon Lillian and had brought her to a sick bed.

As he finished the letter, Dr. Van Buren came in, he seemed tired and worn out.

"I have not slept the whole night," he answered Talbot's anxious question. "I have had any number of calls. I saw two children die last night. They always

seem to imagine that the doctor can do more than God.

"On their knees they beg one to save their children. Oh, I tell you Talbot, it is miserable to feel one's impotence—to be anxious to help and yet be unable to do anything.

"Our science, in spite of all the progress that has been made, is still in its infancy when we so often stand helpless.

"It is no wonder that so many physicians become blunted in their feelings, for were they to surrender to the atmosphere of trouble which usually surrounds them, they could do but little good.

"I, too, have become able to witness pain and death with comparative composure. Nevertheless, I am still very often moved by what I see. To-night, when I saw a mother losing her only child, I was greatly affected."

The evidence of his efforts and feelings were plain in Dr. Van Buren's countenance.

He inquired about Lillian's condition and Victor brought him to her room.

He made a conscientious examination as she lay, still and apathetic, on the pillows. Hearing a heavy sigh from the young husband, he said:

"Thank God, Talbot, that things are not worse. I do not wonder that you are impatient, but everything takes time. I will be here again in the evening.

"I am going out," he remarked. "I am afraid this will be Knight's last day It will be a happy release for him, but still more so for his wife, poor woman, who is worn to the bone.

"Some women possess astonishing will-power and endurance, and she is an example of them. It is high time that she be freed from her burden."

With a hearty shake of the hands, the two men

parted and Dr. Van Buren went thoughtfully on his way. How happy the Talbots could be, he thought, but for the dark suspicion which clouded their intercourse with the rest of humanity! But it was thus wherever one looked.

Everyone had his little package of trouble and grief. Some had a smaller burden and others were bowed low under their load.

There were but few who said they were content with their lot.

The great majority took exception to something or other in their destiny, and indeed, there was no one who had nothing whatever to wish for.

But if these discontented people—these unhappy persons could but look into the Ivy Cotttage—could see Ellen Knight's greatness of soul, they would turn away in shame.

What a bitter lot she had been chosen to bear, and with what angelic patience she bore her cross!

She had lost everything; her fortune, her health, through her husband; and how was she revenging herself on the man who so shamefully dealt with her?

Like an angel of mercy she cared for him at his bedside, soothing his suffering and easing his pain.

The sight of this woman would teach many to bear their petty troubles without complaint.

Dr. Van Buren accelerated his gait the nearer he approached the little cottage. It seemed almost as though he could barely await looking into her soulful eyes.

The charm which this woman exercised over him was remarkable. Frequently, during the day, his thoughts flew to her. Often, when he was at home, he dreamed of her deep dark eyes which would light up with pleasure on his appearance.

Reaching the door at last he rang. An elastic

footstep sounded within and in a moment Ellen Knight stood before him.

This time, however, she did not receive him with her usual good spirits. Her pale, tired face brightened but little, and her eyes were inflamed with their long vigil.

"I am so glad you have come, doctor," she faltered in agitation. "He is so strange to-day, I am terribly anxious. He says such queer things."

Her state of mind was such that she even forgot to give him her hand as usual.

On reaching Knight's bedside, Dr. Van Buren saw that the end was near. The patient was conscious and his mind was clear. He recognized the physician as the latter approached—something he had not done for days.

"Well, how do you feel?" the physician asked.

Knight broke into a short, angry laugh.

"Bah! What is all your science worth!" he cried. "You have not been able to help me, doctor. The devil! I'd never have believed that the game would be over so quick. I wonder how things will look up above. Doctor, do you believe in the nonsense about the other world?"

"You really should have more serious thoughts in this hour," said Dr. Van Buren, reprovingly. "You, yourself, feel that you have but a short time to live. Think rather of what you have sinned against wour wife and against others!

"Is there nothing on your conscience? Do you not wish for spiritual consolation—or is there nothing which you have to regret?"

"A minister?" Knight laughed harshly "Say, doctor, thanks very much, but I don't think I could stomach one. All my life I have got on very well without one of them, so I guess I can die without one!"

Continued in next number

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